

Identity and Place
REL 525—Spring 2022
Tuesdays 1:30-3:20, PRH 210

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Office Hours: T 10-11 and by appointment

“[I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.” —Stuart Hall

“There is no choosing...between...slavery as eventuality and slavery as horizon. It is both, unavoidably.” —Hortense J. Spillers

Course Overview/Description:

This seminar will focus on the importance of place in identity formation—specifically, how subjectivity emerges and evolves particularly in relation to migration and displacement. When, why, and by what means are regional and national affiliations claimed, curated, disavowed, or imposed? How and why are what kinds of borders made and unmade? What do these manufacturings have to do with time, a concept through which we imagine *travel*? And how might a careful examination of those phenomena affect studies of religion? We will draw primarily from migration theory, diaspora studies, and postcolonial studies, and we will give special emphasis to the Middle Passage and African diasporas (though there will be space for students to engage with contemporary examples relevant to their own research).

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students in REL 525 will:

- 1) Learn basic themes and concepts in postcolonial and diaspora studies
- 2) Apply theoretical concepts to creative and literary works
- 3) Gain and apply skills in close reading
- 4) Hone and demonstrate academic writing skills at the graduate level
- 5) Examine the relationships between migration and religious identifications

Texts/Resources:

Assigned readings (as well as some recommended ones) will be available through Google Drive.

Requirements

***Attendance and Participation:** This is a graduate seminar that depends upon substantive and consistent group discussion, so attendance is required. If you know you will need to miss class,

please email me in advance. I expect everyone to do the readings and participate in our conversation. Be prepared to ask questions and contribute your own ideas on the readings.

***Reading and Leading Discussion:** You are expected to read all assigned material (and/or watch any required films) *before* class. Twice in the semester, you will be tasked with leading our conversation (once individually and once in a pair). No formal presentation is required, but you should demonstrate a thorough reading of and engagement with the material. You'll have the floor for the first ten or so minutes, outlining some major themes/questions/ideas that might productively ground our conversation. After that, I'll just rely on you to help facilitate the discussion that ensues.

***Notebook:** Throughout the semester, you will keep a notebook, wherein you will respond to the readings/texts in an entry that takes whatever form you choose. Regardless of how you wish to record your ideas, you need to include *a question and/or theme you'd like us to take up in our discussion that week*. This is the minimal requirement upon which your notebook grade will be based, but you are certainly encouraged to build upon the previous week's discussion/texts as well if you wish and/or record more than one entry per week. Bring your notebook to class every week, and we'll use the entries as conversational guideposts.

***Final Paper:** The final paper in this course will be a research essay (15-20 pages). The topic should reflect your own research interests and take up a specific case study that reflects the co-constitutive dynamic between senses of place and identity. Guidelines will be discussed well in advance.

Grading:

Participation (attendance + leading discussion): 20%

Notebook: 30%

Essay: 50%

*note: I will not give grades of Incomplete in this class.

General Course Policies:

Classroom Environment:

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

Statement on Academic Misconduct:

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offense and is taken very seriously in this class. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by [UA's Honor Code](#) in this class.

Consultations/Safe Zone:

Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you have any questions/concerns. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Also, please note that I am a [Safe Zone Ally](#), one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

Names & Pronouns: (Adapted from [Wooster College, Sample Syllabus Statements](#))

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identity. I include pronoun introductions, recognizing that our own identifications do not always correspond to how we are perceived or read by others. I will do my best to address and refer to all students by the names and pronouns that they share in class, regardless of what is listed on the roster.

Disability Accommodation:

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for services.

Tentative Schedule

(subject to change based on the direction our discussions take)

January

18 Introduction to course: how/why do we place ourselves?

25 **Watch:** *Examined Life* (2008)

Watch: [James Baldwin and William F. Buckley debate](#) (1965—watch Baldwin’s half; Buckley is optional)

Listen: *Intersectionality Matters!* podcast episode “The Story of Us” (parts 1 & 2)

Read: Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1996)

***Kyle leads discussion*

February

1 **Read:**

- Frantz Fanon, “National Culture” (from *Wretched of the Earth*, 1961)
- Brent Hayes Edwards, Prologue from *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003)

Watch: Stuart Hall, [excerpt from *Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life*](#)

***Jacob leads discussion*

8 Anne McClintock (1995), *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1-44)

- “Postcolonialism and the Angel of Progress”
- “The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism”

***Phoebe leads discussion*

15 **Read:**

- Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race”
- Heather Russell, “Critical Paradigms in Race, Nation, and Narratology” (from *Legba’s Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic*, 2009)

***Ciara leads discussion*

22 **Read:**

- Hortense Spillers, “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words” (from *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, 2003)
- Omise’eke Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage”

***Zoe leads discussion*

March

1 **Read:** Christina Sharpe, excerpt from *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

Watch: [“Afropessimism and Its Others: A Discussion between Hortense J. Spillers and Lewis R. Gordon”](#)

****Katie leads discussion**

8 **Watch:** *Daughters of the Dust* (on ua.kanopy.com)

****Peyton leads discussion**

15 NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

22 Brent Hayes Edwards, “A Taste of the Archive”

****Marco leads discussion**

29 **Read:** Saidiya Hartman, excerpt from *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007)

Listen: *Intersectionality Matters!* podcast episode: “Storytelling while Black and Female: Conjuring Beautiful Experiments in Past and Future Worlds” (Kimberlé Crenshaw, with Saidiya Hartman and N. K. Jemisin)

****Kyle and Jacob lead discussion**

April

5 **Read:**

- Robin Coste Lewis, “Voyage of the Sable Venus” (2015)
- James Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones” (from *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 1997)

****Phoebe and Ciara lead discussion**

Case study, Judith Weisenfeld’s *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration*

12 “Introduction”
“Geographies of Race and Religion”

****Zoe and Katie lead discussion**

19 “The Religio-Racial Politics of Space and Place”
“Community, Conflict, and the Boundaries of Black Religion”

****Peyton and Marco lead discussion**

26 Essay discussion/presentation
Final paper due